

UC San Diego Neurologist Named Among Newest Group of Howard Hughes Investigators

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A University of California, San Diego School of Medicine neuroscientist who specializes in inherited brain disorders is one of 15 patient-oriented researchers selected by the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) for appointment as an HHMI Investigator.

Joseph G. Gleeson, M.D., associate professor of neurosciences at UC San Diego School of Medicine, was selected from 242 applicants to join the prestigious institute as part of a special, competitive initiative that underscores HHMI's commitment to ensuring that basic research discoveries lead to improved treatments for patients.



Joseph Gleeson, MD

Gleeson's research in genetic disease involves extensive travel in the Middle East, where he studies family members affected by developmental brain disorders in order to better understand the genetics behind these diseases.

"These 15 physician-scientists are changing the way we think about and treat a variety of diseases," said HHMI President Thomas R. Cech in a press release announcing the newest group of HHMI investigators. "The impact of their research is already being felt...As a group, they have demonstrated extraordinary creativity and innovation."

"These physician-scientists spend their professional lives crossing the boundaries between the laboratory bench and bedside, convinced that patient care informs and enhances their research," the HHMI release explained.

"The department of neurosciences is very proud of Dr. Gleeson," said Doris Trauner, MD, interim chair of the department. "This is a great honor, and he is very deserving of this award. He is the epitome of the physician-scholar, who spans the gap between basic research and clinical care. I'm certain that he will continue to make important new contributions to our knowledge of neurological disorders in children."

Gleeson, who earned his undergraduate degree from UC San Diego and his MD from the Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine, developed his interest in brain disorders in children while doing his residency in pediatrics and a clinical fellowship in neurology. Caring for children with seizures, paralysis and other debilitating disorders linked to developmental brain disorders compelled him to devote his career to finding the underlying genetic causes of these conditions.

While caring for patients through UC San Diego's Center for Cerebellar Malformation, he has also led laboratory efforts that have led to the identification of several genetic mutations associated with abnormal brain development. He and his collaborators travel regularly to Egypt, Kuwait, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and other countries throughout the Middle East to study families with inherited brain disorders. Families from these regions, where marriage among partners who are related by blood is more common, have a higher incidence of recessive genetic disorders. Their inheritance patterns provide an ideal living laboratory to map the genetics of disease.

"Dr. Gleeson is an outstanding example of the power of scientific inquiry to shed light on some of the most devastating disorders of our day," said David Brenner, MD, UC San Diego Vice Chancellor for Health Sciences. "We are proud of his accomplishments, and this HHMI award will further enable him to do exciting research and tackle the hard questions that will give us new insights into human disease."

"This is a great honor that will further our efforts to understand the genetics of brain development, and the mutations that lead to neurological disease," said Gleeson. "More than anything else, the complexity of our brain defines us as humans. I can't imagine being in any other field right now."

With Gleeson's appointment, UC San Diego now has 10 HHMI investigators on its faculty.

Among Gleeson's many other honors are the Klingenstein Award in the Neurosciences, a Searle Scholars Award, a Burroughs Wellcome Fund Clinical Scientist Award in Translational Research, and a Research Advocacy Award from the Joubert Syndrome Foundation.

HHMI is a non-profit medical research organization that ranks as one of the nation's largest philanthropies. In the past two decades, HHMI has invested more than \$8.3 billion for the support, training, and education of the nation's most creative and promising scientists. The HHMI research mission is carried out in collaboration with almost 300 HHMI investigators at more than 60 universities, medical schools and other research institutions around the United States. HHMI investigators are directly employed by the Institute and along with their research teams carry out their research in HHMI laboratories on the campuses.

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To read the HHMI announcement and their biographical sketch of Dr. Gleeson and his work, visit the following site:

<http://www.hhmi.org/> 

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